



December 2004

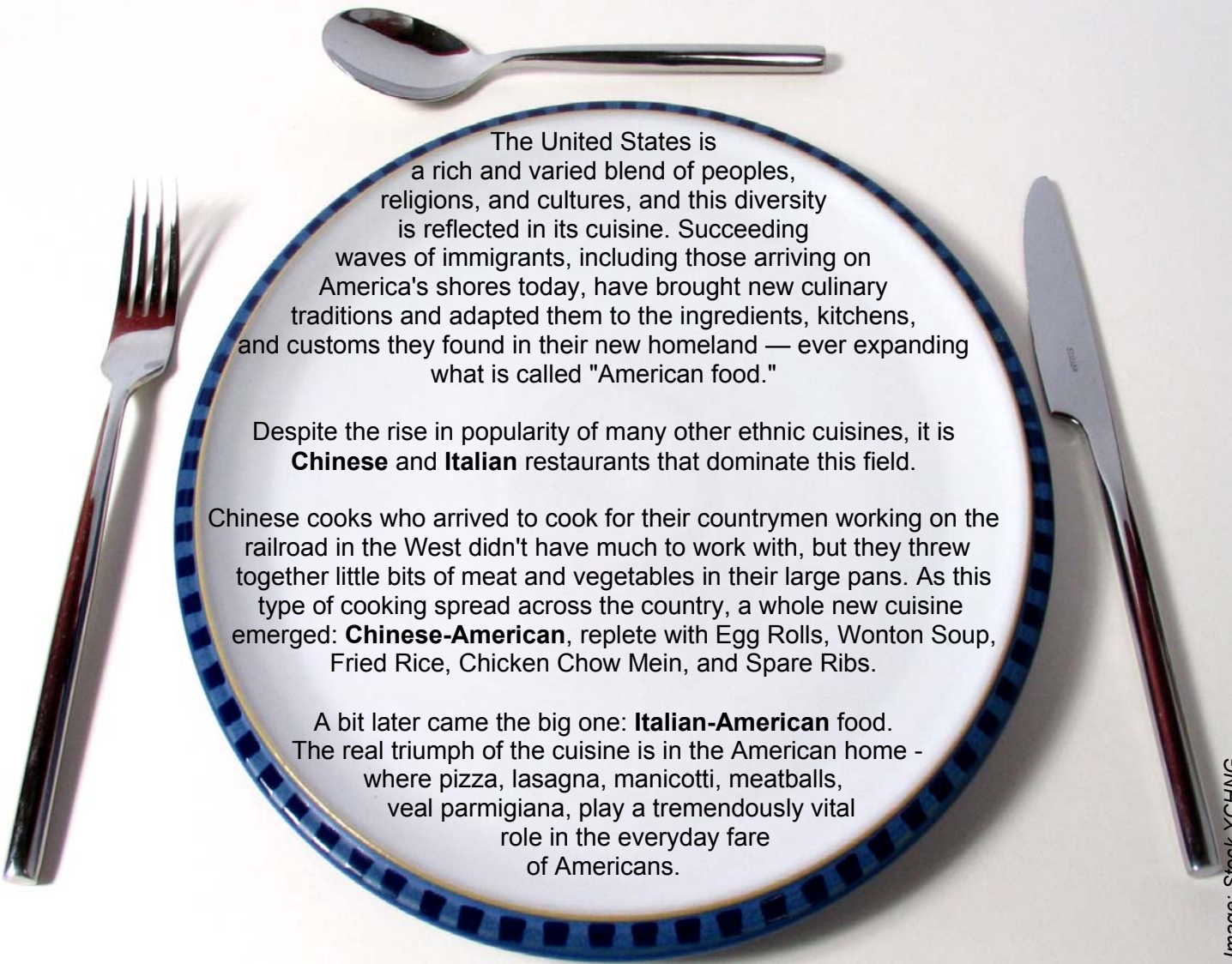
# zoom

in on america

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## AMERICANS AT THE TABLE



The United States is a rich and varied blend of peoples, religions, and cultures, and this diversity is reflected in its cuisine. Succeeding waves of immigrants, including those arriving on America's shores today, have brought new culinary traditions and adapted them to the ingredients, kitchens, and customs they found in their new homeland — ever expanding what is called "American food."

Despite the rise in popularity of many other ethnic cuisines, it is **Chinese** and **Italian** restaurants that dominate this field.

Chinese cooks who arrived to cook for their countrymen working on the railroad in the West didn't have much to work with, but they threw together little bits of meat and vegetables in their large pans. As this type of cooking spread across the country, a whole new cuisine emerged: **Chinese-American**, replete with Egg Rolls, Wonton Soup, Fried Rice, Chicken Chow Mein, and Spare Ribs.

A bit later came the big one: **Italian-American** food. The real triumph of the cuisine is in the American home - where pizza, lasagna, manicotti, meatballs, veal parmigiana, play a tremendously vital role in the everyday fare of Americans.

Image: Stock.XCHNG

When the Harris Public Opinion Poll asked Americans to choose foods which they think of as typically American, hamburgers and cheeseburgers (29%), apple pie (20%) and hot dogs (13%) topped the list. The only other two foods mentioned by significant numbers were barbecue (9%) and fried chicken (7%).

When asked by *Food & Wine* magazine and America Online what the quintessential American food was, most Americans picked a burger & fries (67%) over fried chicken (16%), hotdogs (14%) and ice-cream sundaes (4%).

Adapted partly from the U.S. Department of State's Electronic Journal Americans at the Table - Reflections on Food and Culture: <http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itsv/0704/ijse/ijse0704.htm>

In This Issue: Arab Tastes, December Tables, Win a Book!

ZOOM in on America

## Zoom Asks Americans

If you live in Poland, which American foods do you miss most?

✉ **Untitled - Message (Rich Text)**

File Edit View Insert Format Tools Actions Help

To: zoom@usinfo.pl

Cc:

Subject:

It is hard to say what American food I miss most. Most things are available here, with more and more arriving all the time. I guess I'd have to say that I miss the variety of food available, particularly in San Francisco. There you can find authentic ethnic food from all over the world, plus a large variety of fresh fruits and vegetables that are grown locally.

Me and my family also miss olives and sausages - you can get both here, but not the range of flavors from different spices and preparation methods.

Catherine

"The food I miss the most here in Poland is macaroni and cheese. Of course you can find different kinds of pasta in Polish shops, but I haven't seen the special kind used for mac & cheese, called 'elbow' macaroni. And you don't have the good cheddar cheese we can buy in Wisconsin, which is probably very close to the original British cheddar cheese. Wisconsin is big in dairy production! Another thing I miss is the peanut butter and jelly sandwich, for which you should use the American bread called Wonder Bread and jelly made from red grape juice. I haven't seen this kind of jelly here. Fortunately, peanut butter is available!"

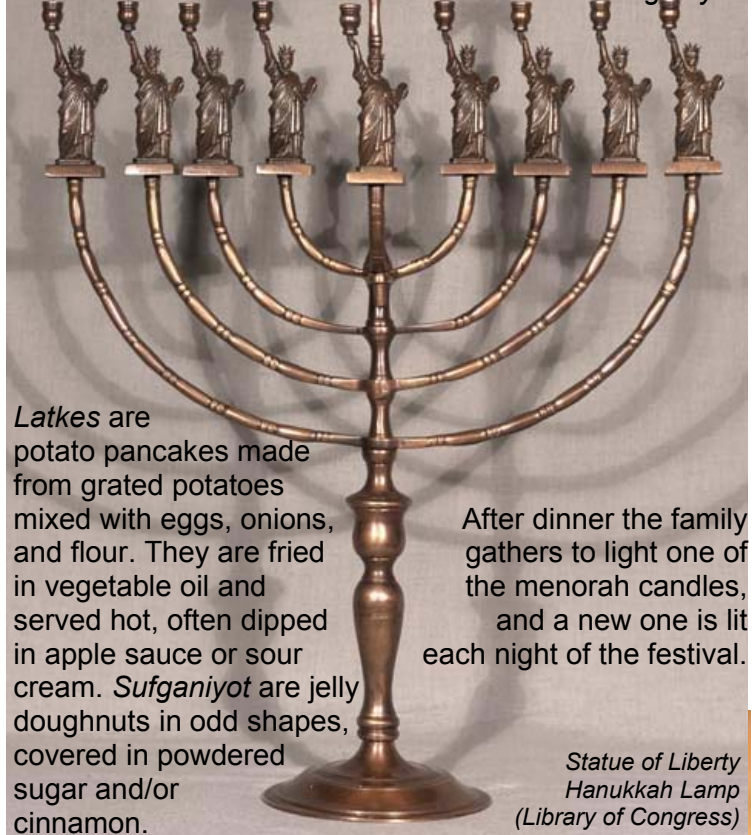
There are several products simply impossible to find in Poland, because they are, for whatever reason, not used. These include food coloring and molasses. I use food coloring for many things, including frosting for gingerbread cookies. Without molasses, there are no gingerbread cookies, period. As for prepared foods, there is simply no way to get Tex-Mex here, and that is something I truly miss. I think the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages: in the States, it's next to impossible to find good pierogi, even in Chicago!

Ray

## Two December Tables

**Hanukkah**, the Jewish Festival of Lights, is an eight-day holiday celebrated in December.

In America the first night usually includes a family dinner with foods such as *latkes* and *sufganiyot*.



*Latkes* are potato pancakes made from grated potatoes mixed with eggs, onions, and flour. They are fried in vegetable oil and served hot, often dipped in apple sauce or sour cream. *Sufganiyot* are jelly doughnuts in odd shapes, covered in powdered sugar and/or cinnamon.

After dinner the family gathers to light one of the menorah candles, and a new one is lit each night of the festival.

Statue of Liberty Hanukkah Lamp (Library of Congress)

The American **Christmas** table looks much like a Thanksgiving feast of turkey or ham, potatoes and pie.

No Christmas is complete without lots of desserts, and nothing symbolizes Christmas more than baked breads and cookies hot from the oven. Many American traditional desserts, like other Christmas customs, were started long ago in other parts of the world.

At Christmas Eve gatherings adults drink *eggnog*, a drink made of cream, milk, sugar, beaten eggs and brandy or rum. Plenty of *eggnog* or hot cocoa is on hand in colder climates for carolers, or people who go from house to house to sing Christmas carols to their neighbors.



Image: Stock.XCHNG

Text on Christmas adapted from Celebrate! Holidays in the USA: <http://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/hol/celebrate.pdf>



# American Mouths, Arab Tastes

On a recent evening at Public, a sultry restaurant in downtown New York City, the high-fashion crowd was three-deep at the bar, all waiting for their tables. But they weren't waiting for sushi, tamales, or brick-oven pizza. They were there for, well, the falafel. Yes, falafel. At this chic hot spot, packed with trendy masses, the coriander falafel with grilled kangaroo and lemon tahini sauce is one of the best-selling dishes on the menu.

The number of restaurants featuring the varied cuisines of the Arab World, from Morocco through the Levant, is currently on the rise in America. And it's not just the number of Arab restaurants that is growing, but also the festive Middle Eastern style of eating - mezze, appetizer-sized portions of different foods, and small plates - and the broad array of Middle Eastern ingredients like grape leaves, saffron, hummus, and couscous.

If you need a crash course in Arab-American culinary fusion, just take a walk down a midtown block in

New York City. There, you'll find streets crowded with food carts and quick-serve spots, all serving kabobs, shwarma and falafel.

The city is also host to a number of more upscale Arabic dining establishments like Kemia Bar. The lounge is packed to capacity nightly, and features belly dancing, DJs and live drumming along with a lengthy menu of dishes like chicken tagine with lemon, olive oil and couscous.



Text adapted from **Hi International** magazine available at <http://hiinternational.com>

Image courtesy of [www.lebanesetaverna.com](http://www.lebanesetaverna.com)

In a book published by the U.S. Department of State - *Writers on America* (<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/writers>), Elmaz Abinader, an Arab-American author, poet and performance artist, recalls her childhood in these words:



Elmaz Abinader is an Arab-American writer and performance artist.

*Children of the Rojme: A Family's Journey from Lebanon*, her first book, is a widely acclaimed memoir of one family's immigration.

She currently teaches at Mills College, Oakland, California.

*Drawing me from the entrance, down the hall, to the dining room, was one of my favorite smells. It was Wednesday, the day of the week when my mother covered the table for eight with newspaper, dragged two large blue cans from the pantry, and lined up the cookie sheets. By the time I arrived home from school in the afternoon, the house smelled of Arabic bread and loaves and loaves of the round puffy disks leaned against each other in rows on the table. She made triangles of spinach pies, cinnamon rolls, and fruit pies filled with pears from the trees growing on our land. Before greeting me, she looked up, her face flour-smudged, and said, "There are 68 loaves. You can have one."*

*By now, my sisters have joined me at one end of the table where we pass the apple butter to each other to slather on the warm bread. When Arabic bread comes out of the oven, it is filled with air and looks like a little pillow; as it cools, the bread flattens to what Americans recognize as "pita" bread. Other bread was rarely eaten in our house;*

*even when we put hot dogs on the grill, they were dropped into a half of "cohibs," then covered with ketchup.*

*The smell was hypnotic and mitigated the melancholy I carried home with my lessons to do that night.(...)*

*Our social interactions on the other side of the door had little weight inside the house. We had a different community who gathered on weekends and during the summer. Relatives from towns around Pennsylvania and Ohio filled our living room and dining room, circling the table crowded with my mother's fabulous array of Arabic dishes: hummus, chick bean dip, baba ghanouj, eggplant with sesame, stuffed grape leaves, shish kebob, kibbee, raw or fried lamb and bulgur wheat patties, a leg of lamb, a turkey stuffed with rice and raisins and platter after platter of side dishes. The famous Arabic bread sat skyscraper high on plates at either end.*

# Activity Page

## Win a Prize!

To take part in a drawing for one of three prizes find the answer to the following question:

**What is a traditional Christmas drink in America?**

Send your answer to:  
**zoom@usinfo.pl**

Give your name and address.  
The deadline is December 31.

## Good Luck!

The winners from the previous issue will soon receive their prizes by mail.

**ZOOM**  
in on america

## About ZOOM

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## ■ In a Nutshell

Food has provided many idioms to the English language. On the left, find idioms for the sentences on the right and use them in the correct form.

**to spill the beans**

Tired of \_\_\_\_\_, Tom applied for and obtained a better job.

**in a nutshell**

Nicholas was upset that he had overslept and missed his math test, but he decided that it was pointless \_\_\_\_\_.

**one's cup of tea**

Tiffany had planned a surprise party for her best friend, Kate, but another classmate \_\_\_\_\_ by mentioning it to Kate during a lunch break.

**to work for peanuts**

"\_\_\_\_\_, our students' exam results have improved greatly in the past year," said principal Harding.

**to cry over spilled milk**

Peter declined the invitation to a Halloween party, saying that it just wasn't \_\_\_\_\_.



USDA photo by: Ken Hammond

## ■ Frog Legs for Dinner?

Transform the following sentences using the word in capital letters.

"How many dishes do you prepare for Christmas dinner?" asked my American penfriend Alice.  
FIND OUT

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Although Bridget tried very hard, she failed to cook dinner for her friends.  
DESPITE

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I have no objections against having frog legs for dinner tonight.  
MIND

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The waiter gave us a dirty look because we didn't give him a high enough tip.  
IF

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## ■ Glossary

**appetizer** - food or drink served before a meal

**carol** - a song of religious joy

**chic** - stylish, smart

**cuisine** - style of cooking

**doughnut** - a small, usually ring-shaped, cake fried in fat

**mitigate** - to make less severe

**pantry** - a room or closet used for storing food

**platter** - a large plate used for serving food

**replete with** - full of  
**slather** - to spread thickly

**sultry** - very hot and humid

**upscale** - appealing to wealthy consumers